

Ellora Caves.

The caves of Ellora are the largest of the kind in India and are also one of the wonders of world on account of their extent, huge dimensions and elaborate carvings. These caves are 34 in number. 12 of them are Buddhist caves, 17 Hindu caves and 5 Jain caves. The Hindu caves belong to the 8th and 9th centuries and the Jain caves to the 10th to 13th centuries.

As regards the Buddhist caves, the first cave is of a Vihara, 52 feet square with 8 cells. The second cave is probably a Chaitya, 48 feet square exclusive of the galleries on each side. There are a large number of images of Buddha seated on a lotus in the teaching posture. The roof is supported by 12 massive columns arranged in a square. There is a colossal Buddha image seated on a lion throne and several images of the Bodhisattvas holding a rosary in the right hand and a lotus stalk in the left hand.

The fifth cave is a spacious Vihara, 117 feet x 58 feet with 24 pillars. The 6th cave has a number of interesting sculptures. The 10th cave is a Chaitya. It has a highly ornamental facade consisting of a porch surmounted by a gallery leading to the minstrel gallery within the chapel. A colossal image of Buddha is carved in front of the Stupa. The other two Buddhist caves are three-storeyed Viharas. They are of considerable size and have carved designs. They have halls divided into aisles by rows of pillars. These Viharas excel all other Buddhist caves on account of the profusion of Buddhist images and ornamentation. The technical aspect of rock architecture reached its climax in these Viharas of the 7th century.

As regard Hindu caves, these are more lavishly decorated than all others. We come across a large number of sculptures, beautifully carved, depicting scenes from Hindu mythology. The most important cave is Kailasa temple of the 8th century. It has the largest rock-hewn cave temple in India. It has the finest and grandest monolithic excavation in the world and an outstanding achievement of the architects and sculptors. It stands in the centre of a vast court supported by rows of pilasters and colossal carved elephants giving the temple the effect of being suspended in mid-air.

As regards the five Jain cave the Indra Sabha and Jagannath Sabha are the most remarkable. The Indra Sabha is two storeyed- It has been said about its upper storey that no other temple in Ellora is so complete in its arrangements or so finished in its workmanship as the upper storey is. Both in physical sculpture and in decorative motif, the artists have produced works of considerable distinction. In the Jagannath Sabha, there is a seated image of Mahavira on a throne.

Amaravati. Amaravati is about 40 miles by motor road from Guntur on the Southern Railway. The great monuments at Amaravati are all in ruins. Practically nothing is left on the site. However, a large number of slabs of white or grey limestone resembling marble that formed parts of panels, friezes, rails and pillars recovered from the old site, testify to the past grandeur of its monuments and the high artistic skill of the sculptors. Most of them are in the Madras museum.

Amaravati was regarded to be a very important seat of Buddhism and it attracted pilgrims from distant places. Its Great Stupa was famous as it contained the relics of Buddha. It was surrounded by a sculptured rail about 13 feet high. The Great Stupa rose to a height of about 100 feet. The rail was formed of upright slabs or pillars about 10 feet high. The inside of the rail was richly carved. The rail was probably the most elaborate and artistic monument of the kind in India. The Stupa measured about 435 feet in circumference at the base. It was entirely faced with slabs of rich sculpture up to the capital. No other Buddhist shrine in India has so many sculptures as Amaravati. It is not equalled by any in quality. Hiuen Tsang rightly observed that it "displayed all the magnificence of the palaces of Bactria." It is possible that the original Stupa might have been built by Ashoka. Mahadeva, one of his missionaries, went to South India and he is supposed to have established a centre there. In the time of Hiuen Tsang, Amaravati was falling in ruins. In spite of that, there were about 20 monasteries still in good condition and they provided residence for nearly a thousand monks belonging to various schools of Buddhism. It was at Amaravati that Hiuen Tsang studied the Buddhist scriptures.

Critics of art point out to four periods of development of the art at Amaravati. During the first period which ranged from about 200 B.C. to 100 B.C., the style was similar to that of Bharhut. The specimens of this period are very few and those also mostly in fragments. They exhibit a certain amount of stiffness, void of flexion. We come across some animals with wings and eagle heads.

The second period was 'up to about 100 A.D. and it showed a definite step forward. The earlier stiffness was less noticeable. For the first time, we have Buddha represented in human form. Women are shown as dressed but they still appear to be nude.

The third period covered the second century A.D. To this period belongs the rail constructed around the Great Stupa. We have a large number of the remains of the rail and their imposing character shows that it was a noble structure. The figures here are delicate and there is a soft touch in them. They crowd in the scenes but there is a light feeling in all. A remarkable feature of these sculptures is the delineation of different planes. In the representation of scenes of action and human emotions, the sculptors of the rail period were complete masters.

The fourth period was during the third century A.D. The figures of this period are sometimes slightly taller and slimmer. Occasionally, they are somewhat diminutive in size. The finest miniature sculptures in small circular bosses in the friezes and casing slabs are the work of this period. Most of the sculptures of this period are carved over the original early casing slabs.

In evolution of Torana or Gateway of a Buddhist Stupa, the earliest type is to be found at Amaravati. It consisted of only a pair of pillars to which were tied the two ends of a fresh wreath daily or periodically. In course of time, it gave place to structural representations as seen at Bharhut and Sanchi. The primitive Torana as depicted in the contemporary sculptural representations of the original great Stupa of Amaravati on its decorative slabs, consisted of two slender pillars. Their tops were guarded by two to four lions. Connecting the four gateways was the rail round the Stupa.

According to Dr. A. C. Sen, the art of Amaravati developed out of the inspiration and style of the artists of Asoka. It is possible that after the fall of Mauryan empire, some of the artists found refuge in the courts of the Satavahanas who were the political successors of the Mauryas. These artists developed the art of the Satavahanas. The art of Amaravati was reflected in the Gupta art. It also inspired the Pahlava cave temple sculptures of the seventh century at Mahabalipuram from where the influence of Amaravati spread to Greater India and its influence can be seen at Borobudur, Prambanam, etc.